

DIRECTIONS
FOR THE
FAITHFUL OF THE N. D.
TOUCHING THE
Future OBSERVANCE of
H O L Y D A Y S.

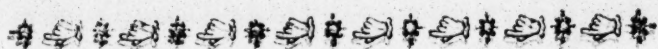


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M DCC LXXVII.





D I R E C T I O N S

FOR THE

FAITHFUL OF THE N. D. &c.

WHEREAS our H. Father, P. Pius VI. has judg'd it expedient to make some alterations in regard to the Feasts of the Saints, which have been heretofore kept in these parts, it is become necessary that we communicate the same to you. But previously, it is fitting that you be put in mind that this point appertains to *discipline* only, and not to *doctrine*; for discipline and doctrine are two different things. The *doctrine* of the Church conveys to you the sacred *truths* revealed of God, which are unalterable; but its *discipline* regulates your *practices and observances*, which are not unalterable: they are
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not determined by divine revelation, but are left to be determined by spiritual superiours, according to their prudence and direction.

Thus for instance, to come to the matter in hand, it is the received doctrine of the Church, that the Saints in heaven do offer up their prayers to God, for our relief, through Christ our Lord and Redeemer: that it is not only lawful, but profitable also, to beg their prayers and intercession for us: and that we ought to honour them, on account of the relation which they stand in towards the Almighty, as his chosen friends and favourites. This, I say, is matter of *doctrine*, which never may be altered, because it is the truth, taught by the Church of God, the pillar and ground of the truth. But it is matter of *mere discipline*, that certain days are appointed to be kept *holy*, in remembrance of the Saints. This discipline may vary according to the various exigencies of time and place. In times past, there were Holydays kept in honour of some Saints, which are not observed at present. The

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Feasts of some particular Saints are commanded to be kept, with great solemnity, in one country, which are not commanded to be kept, at all, in another. In matters of this nature, it belongs to the Pastors of the Church to order what is to be done; to establish a Feast, or to suppress one, as they find it expedient and suitable to the circumstances of the Flock.

Wherever such days are, by proper authority commanded to be kept, every one is bound in conscience to keep them *holy*. First, by the practices of religious duties; but above all, by hearing mass with attention and devotion; and secondly, by resting from servile works, in order that, the concerns of this world being set aside for a while, you may, with more freedom, apply yourselves to the concerns of the next world. For the end, which the Church has in view, is your sanctification, that you become holy yourselves, by keeping the day holy. And there can be no doubt but that the due observance of such an institution is most likely to produce this
salutary

salutary effect. Time well spent in religious duties, is time well spent indeed. It gives honour and glory to God, it draws down his blessings to soften the hardened sinner, to awaken the slothful, to strengthen the feeble, and to improve the morals of all.

But, on the other hand, if the duties of religion are neglected on such days: if worldly business, from which you ought to rest, is nevertheless followed on those days as much as on others, the consequence must needs be, that you lose all those advantages, and, which is still worse, incur the guilt of sin by disobeying the commandment of the Church. Every one that has learnt his catechism knows that the Faithful are bound to hear and obey the Church, under pain of being reputed disobedient to God himself. Christ, when he sent his disciples to preach, told them, *He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me*, Luke, c. x. v. 16. The Church, therefore, acting thus in the name, and under the authority,

authority, of God, has a right to expect obedience from you, when she commands certain days to be kept holy ; which if you neglect to do according to the best of your abilities, you contract the guilt of sin every time that you so neglect it.

An afflicting truth, indeed, considering that the neglect is so frequent, so generally prevailing. The Feasts of the Saints, which, for ages past, had been kept with the most punctual observance, have been so little regarded of late years, that we may, in some measure, apply to the present times that lamentation of the prophet Jeremy, c. i. v. 4, where he says : *The ways of Sion mourn, because there are none that come to the solemn feast.* The case then was, that the temple had been destroyed, and its solemnities abolished. And we may truly say, for the present time, that there are few that come to the solemn Feast, whatever is the cause of it.

There are, it must be owned, several hindrances that have combined together to introduce

introduce and to spread the disorder : but it is not every hindrance that is sufficient to justify the omission. Much may be owing to a general decay of zeal and fervour : but that cannot be called a justification, in good sence : because a decay of fervour is your own fault. Some, indeed there are whose circumstances are a material hindrance : they are at too great a distance, or they are engaged in service where they are not at liberty ; or poverty, perhaps, calls for all their time, to labour for the support of a family. Others again, though not, in truth, so ill circumstanced but they might do something, are nevertheless willing to catch at every appearance of an excuse, and charge their omissions to the account of their circumstances, when, in fact, they should be charged to their indolence. These, and several other hindrances, all strengthened by the example of a people who make no profession of observing such days, have, at last, almost established a persuasion in the minds of many, that it is a matter of no great concern whether they keep a Holyday or not. This has rendered
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the matter truly perplexing to the Pastors of the Church. For, all things considered, there appears no probability of restoring that observance to its primitive vigour: at the same time, it is manifest that, so long as the commandment of the Church continues in force, there are many sins committed by those that disobey without a substantial excuse: and to distinguish when there really subsists such an excuse, and when not, is, in many cases, extremely difficult: Therefore, to remedy this evil, the superiours of the Church have judged it expedient and suitable to the present circumstances, to alter the discipline heretofore enjoined, and to suppress some of the Holydays, as thinking it better not to lay any longer a precept for those days on people who are so little able, or so little inclined, to observe it.

For the future, therefore, only these days are commanded to be kept holy :---
 1mo. All Sundays in the year, without exception; and Easter-Monday and Whitsun-Monday. 2do. Christmas day. 3tio. The

The Circumcision of our Lord. 4to. The Epiphany. 5to. Ascension day. 6to. The Feast of Corpus Christi. 7mo. The Annunciation and the Assumption of our B. Lady. 8to. SS. Peter and Paul. 9no. All-Saints day. 10mo. The Patron of the place, where it is customary to keep one,---All the other Holydays are suppressed; and these which I have now enumerated are the only ones that you are commanded, for the time to come, to keep holy, by resting from servile work, by hearing mass, and practising other religious exercises.

And whereas several of the suppressed Feasts had their proper vigils or eves, on which you are bound to keep fast and abstinence, according to the ordinance of Holy Church, that point of discipline as now altered in this manner, *viz.* The obligation is removed, and laid upon the Wednesdays and Fridays of *Advent*, which for the future, are to be observed with fast and abstinence, in lieu of those vigils.

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But notwithstanding that the Church has condescended so far to the weakness and difficulties of many, as to relieve you from the obligation of keeping those Holy-days, yet she still maintains the same doctrine concerning the Saints; she still sets before you their virtuous lives for your imitation; she still exhorts you to seek to them for aid and assistance thro' Christ our Lord. It is with grief and concern that she finds herself reduced to this necessity of relaxing her former discipline: and we trust that every one, who has any zeal for the House of God, will humble himself on this occasion in the divine presence, and lament the share which he may have had in propagating the disorder. In such cases, it becomes the duty of every good Christian to make amends for the breach that is made, as much as lies in him, by a more exact observance of the few Feasts which are still commanded to be kept. Where much cannot be done, a little must suffice; but that little should be well done: the burthen that remains is not heavy, the obligations

ligations are not many, and we hope that you will fulfil them with a most religious punctuality.

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